

## SEEU Speech June 5, 2010

Speakers:

1. Prof. Alajdin Abazi, Rector of the University
2. Prof. Dennis Farrington, President of the University Board
3. Guest Speaker (USAID Director Michael Fritz)
4. Valedictorian (Best student GPA)

| Graduates, parents and family members, Rector Abazi, Dr. Farrington and members of the Advisory Board, Ministers, faculty and alumni of South East European University, and friends of the University, good morning! **Dobro utro na cite! Mirmandzes tuh dzithveh!**

I am honored to join you today and be a part of this commencement ceremony.

I would like to second Professor Farrington and thank Rector Abazi for his nine years of service to the University and to you, its students. I am particularly pleased that Rector Abazi will remain active with the university, staying on as Rector Emeritus for the next three years.

Why am I here? Perhaps not many of you know that the U.S. Government through USAID was one of the founders of SEEU. From 2001 through 2007 USAID provided \$22 million in support of SEEU in partnership with Indiana University. The Goal: To establish a private institution to redress the inequities of higher education in Macedonia by providing high quality multi-ethnic & multilingual education. Another fact that you may not know is that Southeast European University (SEEU) was the first private higher-education institution in Macedonia. Our assistance covered three areas:

First: As the largest donor, we provided funding for operational costs, infrastructure development, IT equipment, and to strengthen academic and instructional skills through faculty and curriculum development.

Second: A linkage program with Indiana University (IU) was established in November 2001. Indiana University provided assistance in the areas of curriculum & IT development, as well as pedagogical training for teachers of English as a Second Language. Scholarships were awarded to students who needed financial assistance and who met academic criteria, with an aim to retain both gender balance and ethnic diversity. A student loan program was introduced to facilitate financial opportunities for qualifying SEEU students through local savings and lending institutions.

Finally: Our continued support focused on increasing the teaching capacity in the Business Administration and the Communication Sciences & Technology faculties. We helped create a Career Center to prepare students for employment, a Business Development Center to link business companies with SEEU, and an Instructional Support Center to train instructors in modern teaching methods, IT, & English language.

Since 2001, SEEU has grown from a student body of 900 to over 7000 and has the most beautiful and functional campus that I have seen in Macedonia.

But today is not the time to focus on the past. Today is the time to focus on the future. Your future, the future of this institution, and the future of Macedonia.

Look around you. Your neighbors are from different ethnic groups and in some cases different countries, yet you have all shared the same experiences during the last four years in preparation for the next stage in your lives.

This University is a symbol of tolerance and multi-culturalism. And you are its emissaries. I urge you to carry these ideals forward in your personal and professional lives to build a better Macedonia and a better world.

At a time when some may say ethnic tensions are increasing, you offer proof of what is possible when people work together towards a shared goal. You have taken constructive actions to improve your own lives, the lives of your families, your communities, your country and your region. You have chosen not to be bound by the past but instead to embrace the future and all of its possibilities.

The U.S., through the Embassy and USAID, supports all of Macedonia's citizens; be they Albanian, Macedonian, Vlac, Turkish, Roma or any other ethnic group. We believe that a multi-ethnic society is a strength, not a weakness. That is one of the main reasons we helped to create this university.

We also believe that Euro-Atlantic integration remains the best path forward for all the citizens of Macedonia and for the wider region. We strongly support Macedonia's efforts to join the European Union. And it is crucial to recognize that one of the aims of the EU is to meet the challenges of globalization while preserving the diversity of the peoples of Europe.

Diversity is a key value of the European Union: respect for cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and a harmonious blend of tradition and progress.

You, the graduates of SEEU, are uniquely qualified to participate in the larger European context, as your education has incorporated American and EU curricula, in a cutting edge environment.

I encourage you to build on your multi-cultural experience at SEEU by finding out more about the world. Take advantage of opportunities such as Fulbright Scholarships to the US, or Erasmus in the EU. Volunteer, become an intern, scour the internet and check with the Career Center for opportunities, because you are all well qualified and have wonderful opportunities to explore and discover now.

The more we learn of other cultures, the more we grow ourselves and, thus, become better global citizens.

I am proud that the U.S. has been such a strong supporter of SEEU, I am proud of the ideals that the University and its students stand for and believe in and I am proud of

each and every one of you for succeeding in your educational career, and for what you will contribute to you families, your communities and your country in the years to come.

Congratulations! **Chestito! Urime!**

Thank you.